

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 HA-05 PM-05 L-03 NSC-05
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8278
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL KARACHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 7153

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: JOURNALISTS ARRESTED IN KARACHI: HOW STRONG A BLOW TO
CIVIL RIGHTS?

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 6551 (B) KARACHI 3470 (NOTAL)
(C) KARACHI 3490 (NOTAL)

1. A TOTAL OF NINE JOURNALISTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN A HUNGER STRIKE IN KARACHI HAVE BEEN ARRESTED AND DETAINED FOR A PERIOD OF THIRTY DAYS. THE JOURNALISTS WERE LED BY MR. MINHAJ BARNA, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE PAKISTAN FEDERAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS (PFUJ). THE PEACEFUL HUNGER STRIKE PRESSED FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF AN EIGHT-POINT CHARTER OF DEMANDS WHICH INCLUDED REINSTATEMENT OF MORE THAN TWO DOZEN EMPLOYEES OF THE NATIONAL PRESS TRUST PAPERS; AND RESTORATION OF ONE DAILY AND TWO WEEKLY PUBLICATIONS CLOSED DOWN BY THE MLA. MANY OF THESE ISSUES,
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HOWEVER, HAD BEEN SETTLED BEFORE THE STRIKE. DAILY MUSAWAT RESUMED PUBLICATION JULY 20 AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS GIVEN PERMISSION FOR THE WEEKLIES TO RESUME PUBLICATION AS SOON AS THEY FILE ASSURANCES THAT THEY WILL OPERATE WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE LAW.

2.' THE BARNA GROUP HAS BEEN DENOUNCED BY MOST OF THEIR

FELLOW JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING RASHID SIDDIQI AND IQBAL MIRZA, (THE NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY GENERAL OF PFUJ), WHO ACCUSED BARNA OF "DANCING TO THE TUNES OF A PARTICULAR POLITICAL PARTY," A REFERENCE TO MR. BARNA'S CLOSE ASSOCIATIONS WITH BHUTTO'S PPP.

3. COMMENT: THE ARREST OF THE NINE JOURNALISTS IN KARACHI APPEARS TO BE A SETBACK (ALBEIT MINOR PERHAPS) TO THE CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRESS BEING MADE BY THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION. THE BARNA GROUP IS CHARACTERIZED BY SOME RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISTS AS THE "LUNATIC FRINGE" AND TOO OVERLY POLITICIZED TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS MARTYRS FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. HUMMEL

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